

Roper House
Williamsburg
James City County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-237

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office
for Southeast Unit

ROPER HOUSE
Williamsburg, James City County, Virginia

Owner: Williamsburg Restoration (formerly Letty Roper Lee)

Date of erection: Early eighteenth century

Present condition: Demolished, rebuilt

Description (before demolition):

The Roper house may have been one of the earliest in Williamsburg and preserved an unusual number of interesting features. It was frame, a story and a half high, with a steep gable roof. A long addition was made to the rear under a shed roof that rested against the original ridge. This produced a gable of unequal slopes with a rear cornice line lower than the front. It had outside end chimneys, the easternmost of which was laid in English bond and the western Flemish. The front was asymmetric, four bays long, with the door off-center to the east, or left, one window to the left and two to the right. All sashes in these front windows, as well as those in the gable ends, were old and had nine-over-nine lights. The muntins were very wide in all except the east window, where narrower occurred. The jamb pieces in the west room were hollowed out to form weight boxes for counterbalancing the sash. The pulleys, of walnut, were still in place. The windows in the ends had early paneled shutters showing two vertical panels with a horizontal one between; all styles and rails were beaded and panels beveled. The front had blinds that were probably mid-nineteenth century. On the roof were four gabled dormers with modern sash.

All weatherboarding on the front was original, beaded on the lower edge and fixed by wrought iron nails. There was a fully moulded cornice but without modillions. The porch was a nineteenth-century addition, as was the entrance door. In the rear at the west was a modern kitchen wing. Although the rear windows and the door were not old, the openings seem to have been.

In plan the house had a central hall with two rooms on either side. Those in the front were large with high ceilings, the west or living room being considerably larger than the east. It had in common with the hall a base, plaster dado, wood chair rail, and fully moulded architraves framing the windows and forming the jambs and head of the doors. The latter were six-paneled with the square panel in the middle; the styles and rails were beaded and the panels beveled. The cornices were missing throughout the house. The fireplace in the living room was very large and the bricks

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were badly calcined. It was framed by an architrave which supported a shelf.

The dining room was a narrow room with low ceiling. It had a plain beaded chair rail, a four-panel door to the hall, and a mantel which was simply an architrave framing the fireplace opening.

The hall contained a stair typical of the better Virginia work of the period. It had a closed string which was framed by a cyma at top and bottom to form a panel. The posts were square, with simple moulded tops, but they projected above the handrail, which was received against the sides of the posts. The handrail itself was fully moulded. The well turned balusters were the usual thickness of 1-3/4 inches, and the design was the customary one of a long shaft with cap and base above a vase-shaped turning, with a small block separating the two. The stair ascended in two flights, without winders but with a step on the landing. This latter was necessary to get head room for the back door, which originally was directly under the landing. The two upper rooms had no trim to speak of but were of an interesting shape, with the high gabled roof, diminutive fireplaces in the end walls, and in the east room a small window at the side of the chimney.

The house was particularly attractive for its early unchanged character, its beautiful setting, and the remains of an old garden. In the latter was a square smoke house, heavily framed and covered with flush beaded boarding and with a high hipped roof. The original sheathed door with its great lock still remained.

Additional data:

The house was the home for many years of the Roper family, but for whom it was built is unknown. It was the home of the writer from 1929 to 1933.

Author:

Thomas Waterman

Date:

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